

If clothes make the man, or the woman, it is nowhere more apparent than in the work of Hedy Klineman. Her mixed media "fashion portraits" incorporate clothing and other personal effects from leading designers, artists, writers, celebrities and socialites to capture not only their lives, but fashion as an integral part of our era. "I call this my art for the 80's," she says.

around for new surfaces to paint on, she saw her St. Laurent scarf hanging in her studio, grabbed it, stretched it, and painted it. For years, art has inspired designers; now designers were inspiring art.

Over the next year, Klineman took most of her wardrobe from the 1960s and altered it with paint, a comment both on fashion and on herself. She used her Courreges, Pucci, Dior, Thierry Mugler, Mis-

style. She also began to work on commission; her latest acquisition is Michael Jackson's boots, the black suede stompers he wore in the video for "Dirty Diana." These boots were made for moonwalkin' but Klineman has other plans; she wants his jacket, his shades, and his glove as well. Although she has recently begun to use the subjects image when it seems appropriate, she feels that in this case, "his image is so

Michael Musto tossed off bon mots while he lounged in a skin-tight, scenic Cardin shirt and a large peace pin. ("Isn't this divine? I knew if I kept it long enough it would come back.") Sylvia Miles held outrageous court. R. Couri Hay traded tidbits with fellow novelist Rona Jaffe. Aileen "Suzy" Mehle's least best friend Jim Revson made splashing noises in the pool while Beauregarde Houston-Montgom-



Photo by Andy Bruzo

It is a provocative statement. Although the decade won't officially end for a year and a half, the spirit of the era spiraled down the drain last October, and "The Eighties" already has a brittle sound, like a champagne glass tipped over on a table. If the '80s in New York is a triangle, its face is an eight year lunch at Le Cirque; slipping down the sides are the trend-obsessed denizens of downtown and the downwardly mobile middle class, while strung out along the straight line at the bottom are the growing dispossessed.

But it is the face of the '80s that most interests Klineman, the other elements being all the more potent because they are present in her work only by implication.

Her use of fashion is not a mere conceit. She spent ten years in the industry as a fashion coordinator for a textile company and later as president of the American division of Charles Jourdan shoes (the footwear that borders on fetishism), and has always been profoundly moved by fashion as art. During her trips to Paris for Jourdan she began collecting couture clothes, and when, in 1980, she was looking

soni, Kamali, Halston, Hermes, bags by Judith Lieber, jewelry by Elsa Peretti, and of course her shoes by Charles Jourdan, in "self-portraits" that express the artist without using her own image. "What's significant," she says, "is the object and the way it is presented." In one of her sculptural self-portraits, she gently stuffed all her Missoni clothes into plexiglass cubes resting on a pedestal, with the designer's label sticking out. She "signs" the portraits with a label bearing her own name, another take on the fact that she is working with fashion.

Of course this isn't the kind of inspiration that strikes most artists; her first Fashion Portraits show was a shock, and not just to the designers. But her unique combination of access to couture clothing and a firm belief that "one can not be possessed by one's possessions — it is a freeing thing to take something of value or beauty in one's life and commit it to art" gave Klineman an opportunity to break new ground.

Soon she was raiding the closets of friends, many of whom are the most talked about figures in the social scene, and all of whom share a heightened awareness of

much in the public eye that it's more mysterious to use him without it — or alter it."

But Klineman is not just a culture vulture. She has "always painted in styles of the period," from her early abstract expressionist work as a student at Cooper Union in the early '60s to her flat color field work and later built-up color field paintings of the '70s, to the neo-expressionist, figurative work of the early '80s. Her discovery of the wealth of material in fashion coincided with the rise of both uptown and downtown society in the media, and it is here that the German born designer has found her niche.

For many in the art world, the lure of society has been a seduction they can not afford, and for others, an alliance they cannot afford to pass up. For Klineman, whose portraits are set in the context of society, its members are her inspiration, and her parties, places where its mignons can mingle. The night her show opened at the Vered Gallery, fifty guests, many of them friends she has portrayed, feasted in her East Hampton home, drinking champagne while balancing plates on their skinny knees.

and Francesco Scavullo looked on. Aerobics guru "Fizz" Ed Williams clucked as he analyzed the goodies on everyone's plates (And when am I going to see you in class?). Baby Jane and her son Rusty Holzer, on leave from Harvard, talked horse show. Randy Schindler surrounded himself with beautiful girls, while Kent Klineman discussed investments in the kitchen, far from the maddening crowd.

In the middle of her coterie, Hedy Klineman reclined on a banquette, looking like an elegant sprite in a lace dress with a white Armani blazer and matching Armani hat. "I'm very much an uptown/downtown person," she said in her honey-suckle voice. "I live on Park Avenue in the city with my family but my studio is on 23rd Street and I'm very much in the avant garde. I also love people so it's natural that I would use the things that are precious to my friends in my art."

In a way, many of her pieces seem elegiac, as if the clothes belonged to someone who has passed away, yet they are still filled with the peculiar personality of their

continued on page 73

VEDDY HEDY

Hedy Klineman, by Cornelia Ravenal

KLINEMAN

continued from page 63

former owners. This is particularly apparent in the portrait of *East Hampton Star* publisher Helen Rattray, who took over the newspaper after her husband died. Rattray donated one of her old cardigans and a pair of glasses, but Klineman's treatment is an eerie reminder that her husband's spirit is still very much with her. "I follow my instincts," she said, "and the objects begin to tell me things." Her silk-screen portrait of old friend Andy Warhol is also a memorial. In a previous portrait she had used his glasses; in her most recent, done after his death, she used the mere image of his glasses.

For the most part, Klineman concentrates on the bright lights in the big city, but her awareness of the flip side has led her to donate her work to benefit numerous charities, including one commissioned by Barney's for the Centennial. "I had taken a Halston sea-foam green dress and put a Statue of Liberty face on it," she said, "then I took a mannequin arm and in the arm was a paintbrush and she was holding the most important art book I had, Anthony Snowden's book, *Private Lives*, with all the wonderful English artists of the '60s. The piece was shown in the windows of Barney's and photographed many times; I gave it to a benefit for Martha Graham." She has also donated work to Art for AIDS and is on the board of S.O.S. Animals, and added, "I really hope that more people will give me their things instead of throwing them in a closet so that I can make art with them to benefit more charities." She also hopes to put together a book, called *Fashion Portraits: Art of the '80s*, in which interviews with her subjects will serve as counterpoints to their portraits, and to begin a series on couples.

It would be easy to dismiss Klineman's art as simply trendy, and in fact, the label "fashion portraits" both describes and diminishes the value of her work, where pop meets prop, painting meets theatre, and style meets a sly comment on style. Nevertheless, it is interesting that while Klineman's art takes its inspiration from the clothing of her subjects, the clothes on the canvas both have a life of their own and constantly remind one that there is no one in them, a rather sardonic comment on life in the '80s.

And what about the coming decade? "My art for the '90s will be very much involved with putting the century together, a documentary aspect, more about memory, history, thinking about the planet, as the century ends, grouping people together," she said. "I think my work will also have a more spiritual aspect."

But as we leave the '80s, fashion is still the most salient expression of the time and its most celebrated individuals, a case, perhaps, of the tail wagging the dog. Klineman has tapped the power of fashion, but her work also makes a subtle statement: on the social face of our decade, the most representative individual is not simply a slave to fashion, but a partner with it. The question is, which partner is silent? In an era when labels are more eloquent than thoughts, Klineman renders its most visible personalities in a way that questions their very existence, ironically turning them into invisible men and women whose presence is felt, but who can only be seen by the audience as walking suits, dancing gowns, and disembodied gloves, performing sleight of hand in the dark.